

## **INFELIX DIDO**

### **Vergil and the notion of the tragic**

J. Swanepoel, Potchefstroom University

#### **Introduction**

The *Aeneid* is a text which elicits many questions from the reader. One of the fascinating aspects is the depiction of Dido, queen of Carthage, in this epic. Dido, the founder of the might of the Carthaginians, the arch-enemies of those who would later become the Romans, is one of the most captivating figures in this epic. While one could argue that the poet simply had the insight to juxtapose one figure of greatness with the other in order to place Aeneas, the primogenitor of the Romans, in heroic relief, Vergil actually goes much further, according to most modern commentators. Mackie (1988:82), for example, states that the poet gives Dido a privileged position in the epic: "Vergil does not desire that the reader's sympathy be shared between the two characters: the vast imbalance in their dramatic roles is intended to focus our attention and sympathy on the decline and death of the queen." Boyle (1986:115) is rather more nuanced. He points out that the fourth book of the *Aeneid* as a whole is focused on "a dramatic narrative which illustrates in vivid personal terms the cost of the pursuit of imperial greatness. The emphasis in this book is predominantly (though not entirely) upon the personal sufferings of Dido, with whom Virgil's sympathy predominantly lies."<sup>1</sup>

Though this perception may simply be based on extra-textual considerations, literary arguments can be put forward to support it. No statistical approach to literature is required to notice that much more narrative space in Book 4 is devoted to Dido than to Aeneas. In this book Aeneas utters only two speeches comprising 35 lines, while Dido speaks nine times and 189 lines are devoted to her words. The mode of narration, too, favours Dido (see Sanderlin 1961:82-85 and Mackie 1988:81-82).

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<sup>1</sup> The verdict that the sympathy of both the poet and the reader lies with Dido, is not shared by all. In this regard Feder (1954:203) points out that Dido is often incorrectly depicted as the heroine in a realistic romance, and Aeneas as the insensitive person who turned his back on her. According to this author the mistake which leads to erroneous readings, is to read Book 4 in isolation. When the epic is considered as a whole, it is clear that Aeneas is the main figure, and not Dido. Furthermore it is suggested by some authors that the modern reader with his sentimental and romantic inclination exhibits a sympathy with Dido which would vastly differ from the way in which a Stoic reader would assess this love affair, but on this also criticism has not been absent. Farron (1983:83) is exceptionally critical of this point of view, which dates at least as far back as De Sgrais in the seventeenth century and which had famous supporters (for example Dryden, Purcell and Berlioz) as well as enjoying favour in the twentieth century with Pease, Prescott and Mcleish.

Nor is the sympathetic reaction to Dido's affliction and downfall absent. A typical example of this is the conclusion reached by Niall Rudd (1976:52-53) in his stimulating discussion of Dido's *culpa*: "The pity we feel as we see her in the grip of this terrible power turns to horror as we watch her total disintegration. But even when she is screaming for vengeance and calling down a curse of eternal enmity, it hardly occurs to us to condemn her. For whatever her deserts may have been (and I have argued that it is not easy to make a clear case against her) she did not deserve to suffer so cruelly."

In the discussion of Dido as a tragic figure one should not lose sight of the fact that through the centuries the *Aeneid* has been viewed primarily as a national epic (see Feder 1954:209 n.3 for bibliographical references). This gives rise to the question: what would the (albeit hypothetical) contemporary Roman reader have thought of the depiction of Dido? While few readers would deny that a national element may be demonstrated in the *Aeneid*, it should be kept in mind that in the twentieth century, after the Second World War, and especially since the sixties, an appreciably more critical disposition towards a purely national interpretation of the *Aeneid* is demonstrable. Here I am referring to the so-called Harvard or American School of Vergilian criticism. In contrast with the European School of Büchner (1961), Klingner (1961b), Buchheit (1963) and Pöschl (1970), who read the epic primarily as a text in which order triumphs over chaos and in which Aeneas and his descendants play a formative role in world history, indeed not without adversity, but with eventual success, the Harvard School places the emphasis on the ambiguity of the *Aeneid*. The exponents of this train of thought are (to greater or lesser degrees) of the opinion that in the *Aeneid* the poet does not take a position entirely free of criticism vis-à-vis the calling of the Roman, the mission of Rome and the Augustan renaissance. Parry (1963:79), with his pronouncement that one hears two voices in the *Aeneid*, namely "a public voice of triumph, and a private voice of regret", has laid down the parameters for much of the critical debate which has since been conducted on the *Aeneid* (see Johnson 1976:8-16). Here Vergil pre-eminently becomes the poet of melancholy, nostalgia, loss, sorrow, frustration, emptiness; in short, of the *lacrimae rerum* (Parry 1963:69,71). Within this broad frame of thought one could further distinguish between proponents of a pluriform, ambivalent reading of the epic, and those who stress the pessimism of the text.

Where extreme positions are encountered, one should also expect attempts at reconciliation thereof. In this connection O'Hara, who has strong reservations about an "unhesitatingly optimistic and encomiastic" interpretation of the *Aeneid*, writes that for too long researchers have argued whether the *Aeneid* is optimistic or pessimistic. He contends that in this text Vergil gives expression to "both the age's hope for the peace of a Golden Age under Augustus, and its fear that this hope might be deceptive and illusory" (O'Hara 1990:6; see also Miles & Allen 1986:38). Arkins (1986:33-35), in turn, tries to establish a theoretical basis for explaining why the *Aeneid* is so fundamentally ambiguous. He is opposed to a reductionism which would have the reader choose between an optimistic and a pessimistic reading of the text. Thus he takes the line of indeterminability: "... the *Aeneid* offers no magic answers to the problems of human existence. It should no longer be thought that it does."

In her thorough overview of developments in Vergilian research in the Anglo-American world, Malan (1993:159) has established that the pendulum is probably swinging once again. The publication of the works of Hardie (1986) and Cairns (1989) favours a more

<sup>2</sup> This does not purport that the reading of a text is confined by its reception by the first or contemporary readers, or that such a reading is normative. On the other hand, an attempt to reconstruct it is not irrelevant either, especially if it should emerge that the contemporary and modern readings differ sharply.

Augustan reading of the epic than had been customary for the past two decades in the Anglo-American world. A very clear reaffirmation of an optimistic, or so-called realistic, interpretation of the *Aeneid* has recently been put forward by Jenkyns (1988).

The import of the preceding contextualization, from which it is evident that not only the nationalism of the *Aeneid*, but also the basic view of reality thereof is in contention, lies therein that a particularly sympathetic interpretation of the Dido figure and the persuasion that the view of reality in the epic is one of darkness, very often tie in with a preference for a Harvard oriented *sfumato* reading of the *Aeneid*.

## Central issues

In the light of the preceding exposition, this article will explore the following issues:

- \* Is the depiction of Dido positive (without qualification)?
- \* Is Dido a tragic figure, and does she bear the blame for her downfall?
- \* Is Dido's downfall morally justified?

These questions are connected with sub-questions of great complexity, which are obliquely addressed in this article, and then primarily thematically, viz

- \* the relationship between divine and human action (i.e. the problem of determinism and free will), and
- \* the relationship between morale, history and cosmology.

My main aim is, through the discussion of the main issues, to provide a perspective on Vergil and the notion of the tragic, specifically as far as his depiction of Dido is concerned.

## Methodological considerations

In this discussion I shall attempt to close my ears to the siren song of systematization. It is indeed always a substantial danger to reduce Vergil's "living fictions" to a rigid system (see Johnson 1976:18; see further Pöschl 1970:5 about the perils of a rationalistic approach.) In addition the reader of the *Aeneid* constantly has to keep in mind that more often than not Vergil transcends the reader's horizon of expectations, and that his work is not easily susceptible to generalization (see Cairns 1989:ix).

What gives rise to much of the complexity of this epic, is the richness of the text, specifically the fact that the *Aeneid* is a multivocal poem. In a multivocal epic such as the one under discussion, one has to distinguish between the voices of the characters or textual figures on the one hand, and that of the narrator on the other hand.<sup>3</sup> With respect to the first category we can expect the *pro domo* arguments. Here we shall see how each man or god views himself and his actions. In my opinion, however, the voice of the narrator is decisive in determining the ideology of the text. It is, of course, yet another question whether Vergil's narrator speaks with a single voice. This does not mean that I profess that the character voices do not undoubtedly play their part in the tenor of the *Aeneid*, nor that

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<sup>3</sup> Rudd (1976:36) acknowledges the methodological importance thereof. While Otis (1969:78) is of the opinion that the moral vision of Vergil and that of Dido coincide, Rudd is contrarily persuaded.

interesting readings could not emerge from attempting to read a text against its grain. Especially I do not profess that the reader has to subscribe to such an ideology.

A further consideration which will be motivated more fully presently, is that in my discussion I shall comprehensively make use of drama constructs. In this process, however, care must be taken to study the drama of Dido and Aeneas in harmony with the central theme of the epic as a whole, and not as something detached from it.

#### Book 4: elements of tragedy in an epic

In many respects Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, though it is part of an epic, resembles a tragedy (see Quinn 1968:323ff.). This is the case to such an extent that one could discuss this book by way of drama constructs. One who would do this, could even take recourse to Aristotle,<sup>4</sup> because in his *Poetics* he stresses the close congeniality of tragedy and epic. In light of this I am of the opinion that there is much to be said for discussing our theme by way of drama constructs,<sup>5</sup> i.e. for a mode of discussion which tries to do justice to the interaction of the epic, which has been described as "the most public of all literary forms" (Cairns 1989:129), and tragedy with its more individual directedness. Besides the fact that many commentators have pointed out that Book 4 of the *Aeneid* is patterned on a tragedy, there is a textual hint in this book which points in that direction. Here I am referring to *Aeneid* 4.467-473, a relatively odd passage, and one which, because of its metaliterary nature, has not escaped the criticism of commentators. In this scene Dido in her terror and solitude dreams of a ferocious Aeneas pursuing her. The narrator compares her to figures from tragedy, Pentheus and Orestes, who are afflicted by the Furies. While some commentators in their discussion of this passage place the emphasis on the familiarity of the Roman reader with these figures on the Greek and Roman stage (see Tilly 1968:128), I view the crux of this consciously literary reference as a perspective presented to the reader to regard Dido among the ranks of great figures from the sphere of tragedy, and to view her as someone who like Pentheus and Orestes is afflicted and persecuted by the Furies (see further Thornton 1976:99).

Classical tragic drama is usually characterized by a conflict which takes place and reaches conclusion, and by the downfall of a grand yet typical figure. His/her downfall is often the result of a "tragic flaw". To put it technically, one can say that usually there is a certain *metabasis* as a result of a particular *hamartia*. It is also typical for the tragic figure to reach insight before his death, but nevertheless to meet death head-on, persevering with the course taken.

Conflict in the *Aeneid* occurs on various levels. Here I link up with the distinction by Pöschl (1970:23-24) of different niveaux in the epic. On a cosmic level there is conflict between the *fata* and those divine forces (notably Juno) which oppose the fulfilment of that which fate has ordained. Though seemingly Juno obtains the assent of Venus for the marital events in Book 4 (see 4.90-128), there is also conflict between these two patrons of the main protagonists in the story. On the niveau of the heroes conflict progressively develops between Aeneas, the prince from Troy, and Dido who hails from Tyre and is

<sup>4</sup> "Thus anyone who can discriminate between what is good and what is bad in tragedy can do the same with epic; for all the elements of epic are found in tragedy, though not everything that belongs to tragedy is to be found in epic." (Aristotle, *De Arte Poetica*, 5, Dorsch's translation, 1970:38).

<sup>5</sup> This is, of course, not the only possibility. Compare for example the recent (quite successful) attempt to read the *Aeneid* by way of the codes of the (love) elegy (see Cairns 1989:129-150).

queen of the emerging Carthage. There are clear indications also of conflict in the minds of the heroic figures themselves. On the historical level the conflict which would later ensue between Rome and Carthage is symbolically suggested.

Ruin as well, that watermark of tragedy, is clearly present. The tragic fall of Dido can in fact be noted as the main theme of Book 4. Pöschl (1970:91), one of the most sensitive readers of Vergil in our century, in fact refers to this book as "the book of Dido". The fact that here one finds the fall of a remarkable figure, corresponds with the Aristotelian concept of the tragic figure. Dido, whom initially we came to know in royal splendour, degenerates in the course of the tale to a raving woman with bloodshot eyes (4.642-644). The fact that she is modelled on tragic figures can even be seen in the adherence to certain conventions. Clausen (1987:53-60), for example, points out that the death of Dido is not only tragic in the vague, unliterary sense of the word, but also in the strict sense, since it conforms to a recognizable pattern in Greek and notably Sophoclean tragedy.<sup>6</sup>

It is, however, the question of the guilt or culpability of Dido regarding her own destruction, which makes the *Aeneid* problematic to the reader. This is a topic which Anderson (1969:44) rightly indicates as "an old controversy". Can one really say that Dido goes under as a result of her own doing? Or is she rather a pawn in the chess match of the gods? A victim rather than one who freely exercises a choice? Or is it possible that she can simultaneously make a choice and yet be a victim?

If one looks at expositions and definitions of the tragic - and then one needs to bear in mind that that which is described as "the tragic" has developed historically and that it may be something which is culture-specific (see Conradie 1992:537) - it is notable that in many (though not all) descriptions of the concept it is accepted that a tragic figure goes under because of a certain "tragic flaw", and that he bears the blame for his own downfall. Heeringh (1961:15) puts it well: "De tragische held roept zelf het onheil over eigen leven op." The concept of the tragic is rooted in a faith in the liberty of man: "It is man's reaching for the heights that makes possible the tragic fall." (Shipley 1970:340)

In his discussion of the Aristotelian concept of *hamartia*, i.e. the "tragic flaw", Shipley (1970:340) writes: "The change from happiness, from the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity, to misery is effected not through innate depravity but through a weakness or lack of insight within the character itself."<sup>7</sup> There is difference of opinion concerning the semantic content of this concept, which is sometimes translated as "flaw" and

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<sup>6</sup> A very important facet of the tragical to which full justice cannot be done in this discussion, but which is worthy of mention, is that by the words she utters, Dido is connected with a variety of tragic figures in classical literature. Often one recognizes in her words echoes of other tragic figures (see Highet 1972:218-231). Especially noteworthy is the association with Ariadne and Medea. The resonances of heroines in the writings of Apollonius, Sophocles and Catullus are unmistakable in the utterances of Dido. Jenkyns (1988:63) in turn points out Dido's association with Nausicaa, Calypso, Circe and Penelope. His opinion is that the literary ballast carried by Dido is part of her "tragic burden", and that eventually she collapses beneath it. Cairns (1989:134) too draws attention to the fact that Vergil has modelled Dido according to various female figures from Attic tragedy and the *Odyssey*.

<sup>7</sup> See Aristotle (*De Arte Poetica* 13, Dorsch's translation, 1970:48). He propounds that tragedy must evoke fear as well as compassion. As far as the tragic figure is concerned, he writes: "This is the sort of man who is not conspicuous for virtue and justice, and whose fall into misery is not due to vice and depravity, but to some great error, a man who enjoys prosperity and a high reputation, like Oedipus and Thyestes and other famous members of families like theirs."

sometimes as "error" (see Rudd 1976:35 and Moles 1984:49, 50). Rudd (1976:34-35) holds the opinion that the Aristotelian meaning of the word is "error", even if "flaw" previously used to be the more popular interpretation. Moreover he contends that a distinction is to be made between moral and intellectual concepts, and fancies the point of view that a deed can never be "a blemish of character". In my opinion this is a somewhat artificial distinction, since the actions of a tragic figure often emanate logically from his character and thoughts.<sup>8</sup> Currently many scholars accept that *hamartia* has a wide spectrum of meaning which covers various types of mistakes, often including a moral choice (Moles 1984:50).

For the sake of discussion which follows, it is desirable to try and summarize with a few strokes of the brush some important opinions on the tragic. This will entail some simplification, and the authors do not necessarily agree. Here one can refer to a characterization of the tragic awareness of the Greek tragedians, presented by Sullivan (1969:161-162). Whereas the tragedies of Sophocles are based on a notion of man's responsibility for his actions, the suffering and demise of man in some of the greatest tragedies of Euripides are the result of divine vicissitudes. In such dramas, where the focus is on what actually happens rather than on what ought to happen, Euripides presents "the pitiable and terrifying spectacle of man torn by contrary passions or by a passion which collides with his better judgement". In Aeschylus one finds the notion that man can learn wisdom from his adversity, and this as a favour from the gods. A further perspective which is important for the reflection on the moral justifiability of Dido's death, is the distinction drawn by Steiner (1961:6-7) between two divergent visions of the tragical: "The Judaic vision sees in disaster a specific moral fault or failure of understanding. The Greek tragic poets assert that the forces which shape or destroy our lives lie outside the governance of reason or justice."

The cardinal question on which the culpability of Dido pivots is thus whether she is purely a victim of the ordinances (and the machinations) of the gods, or whether she herself exercises a choice which leads to her downfall. In order to take a stance on this, one has to examine the conduct of the gods on the one hand, and events which point to Dido's responsibility and blame on the other hand.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Pöschl (1970:71) stresses the close interaction between character and situation, pointing out how Dido's tragedy follows from her character. Quinn (1968:325) too draws attention to the fact that a truly tragic plot depends on an interaction between personality/character and circumstances.

<sup>9</sup> The complex issue of the relationship between divine and human action cannot be treated in the scope of this article. Opinions of researchers in this regard differ sharply. The two extremes (which can both be rejected as over-simplifications) are represented to the one side by a mechanistic determinism where man is nothing more than a puppet in the puppet theatre of the gods, and to the other by a conviction which relegates divine action to part of the epic decor. In contrast to this one finds the qualified determinism of a Thornton (1984:19), which places the centre of gravity with the *fata*: "... in the world of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which is ruled by fate, man's freedom is limited. In major issues, his actions are firmly fixed by fate, but his attitude to such actions is of his own choosing: he may freely consent, like Aeneas in the second half of the *Aeneid*, or disobey for a short while and then unwillingly obey, like Aeneas in the first half of the epic. Anyone who consistently disobeys or disobeys too long is doomed to death." Wlosok (1981:762) takes a critical view of Thornton's persuasion, because it accords human liberty too little recognition. Pöschl (1970:72), as well, does not subscribe to a deterministic theory. Otis (1963:226-227) has in turn formulated a theory of complementarity, according to which divine and human action are interactive, and not simply a one-way phenomenon. For a

## The role of the gods

In order to understand the story of Dido, the reader has to look wider than only Book 4. In spite of the fact that Vergil conceived each of the twelve books as an artistic unit with its own structure (Highet 1972:20), this story has its preamble already in Book 1, where Aeneas and his battered fleet go ashore on the coasts of North Africa and are hospitably received in this alien country. But even the arrival in North Africa and the entire course of events which is recounted in the first four books, has already been perspectivized by the narrator in the *prooemium* to Book 1. The theme of founding (*ktisis*) is hereby indicated: it is a narration about the ordeals of Aeneas which will eventually result in the *altae moenia Romae* (1.7); a story of the pains it cost to found the *gens Romana* (1.33). Already in the wider *prooemium* the reader notes that Juno prefers Carthage as the chief seat of the nations (1.12-18).

When first the reader meets Dido, she is compared in her splendour and royal dignity with Diana.<sup>10</sup> She is depicted as *Dido laeta*, the joyful queen, surrounded by a group of warriors, where she oversees the rise of her city and her future kingdom (1.503-504). Though Dido received the Trojans hospitably, one should not lose sight of the fact that Jupiter, the head of the gods, and Venus, the divine mother of Aeneas, have much to do with this friendly reception. In light of the accentuation of the question of knowing and not knowing which follows later, it is highly significant to note that Jupiter sends Mercury to ensure that Dido does not act *fati nescia* (1.297-300). It is, however, particularly the scene where Venus, concerned for the safety of her son and his followers, kindles the flame of love in Dido's heart (1.657-722) which places in question Dido's own blame. When the queen of Carthage places Ascanius on her lap, not knowing that in fact it is Amor (i.e. Cupid), the god of love and son of Venus, one can justifiably ask whether here one is rather dealing with pathos than with tragedy.<sup>11</sup> Even at this stage the narrator leaves the reader in no doubt as to the effect of the actions of Amor: Dido is incapable of divesting herself of this love: *infelix pesti devota futurae / expleri mentem nequit*, ... (1.712-713). Dido's affection for Aeneas increases as a result of his account, during the banquet, of the fall of Troy and of his own and his companions' sojourns which landed them in North Africa, as narrated in the second and third book of this epic. The irony employed by Juno is understandably caustic when in Book 4 she congratulates Venus on the fame which Venus and her son Amor won through the vanquishing of a single woman by the guile of two gods (4.93-95). It is out of concern for Dido and the interest of her beloved Carthage that Juno tries to arrange a marriage between Aeneas and Dido.

In light of this it must be asked: is there any question of tragedy, where goddesses plot their schemes and man is deceived, and where in the figure herself a moral choice (*prohaeresis*) may be absent (see Moles 1984:51)? Is tragedy at all possible within the framework of a world vision where the *fata* play such a decisive role, even if like

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view of the role of the *fata* and the gods in the epic as "figural structures", see Williams (1983:3-39).

<sup>10</sup> See Pöschl (1970:62-63) for a discussion of this often misunderstood comparison; see further Williams (1983:62). Cairns (1989:40ff.), again, points to the initial depiction of Dido as a good ruler, something which later changes.

<sup>11</sup> Jenkyns (1988:61) rightly points out that "greatness of tragedy distinguishes it not only from sheer horror but from pathos". Pathos is not necessarily less captivating than the tragic, but is nevertheless not identical to it.

Thornton (1976:88) one were to accept that the scheming of Juno and Venus is contrary to the plan of Jupiter?

## Dido's *culpa*

If the exposition given above creates the impression that Dido was simply a toy of the gods, then it is appropriate that the reader also view the other side of the coin, because there also are various indications that Dido does indeed bear responsibility for her downfall. Key concepts in this regard are *culpa*, *pudor* and *crimen*.

The attentive reader will notice how the poet has already in Book 1 brought to the fore Dido's predisposition towards love (see 1.343-352). Right at the start of Book 4, where Dido, scarcely in her right mind (*mala sane*) addresses her sister Anna, it is evident how taken and impressed with the hero from Troy she is. If not for an adamant resolve on her part, she who was betrayed by death in her first marriage with Sychaeus, might for this one person yield to the *culpa*.<sup>12</sup> Although she indicates that she recognizes the signs of the old flame of love, she invokes a curse upon herself if she should violate *pudor* or should un-bind its bonds:

"sed mihi vel tellus optem prius ima dehiscat  
vel pater omnipotens abigat me fulmine ad umbras,  
pallentes umbras Erebo noctemque profundam,  
*ante, pudor, quam te violo aut tua iura resolvo.*  
ille meos, primus qui me sibi iunxit, amores  
abstulit; ille habeat secum servetque sepulcro."  
sic effata sinum lacrimis implevit obortis.

(4.24-30)

Though Dido here exhibits a steadfast resolve, one should not lose sight of how charged some of these words are: *succumbere* is indicative of how, deep in her heart, the queen would regard infidelity to her oath. Likewise *viol* is a powerful word. That she wants to remain true to Sychaeus is eloquently expressed, but the reader understands what the language of her tears is saying. Therefore I cannot agree with Anderson (1969:44) who, while he wants to oppose nineteenth century Victorian notions of the sanctity of marriage, criticizes the view that Dido's blame is connected with the breaking of her oath to Sychaeus. To argue that such a notion is unrealistic and is furthermore not in keeping with the practices of the time (see Rudd 1976:42-47), flies directly in the face of several of Dido's own utterances. The curse which she invokes upon herself has to make one mindful of this. The fact that it was general practice to remarry, and that Aeneas can remarry, does not mean that it is permissible for Dido, for the very reason that it contradicts her own conscience. According to the morals of Antiquity there was no room for love which was in conflict with royal restraint (Cairns 1989:43). There is thus a subjective as well as an objective dimension to her *culpa*. Without *pudor* there is no place for her in the upper world.<sup>13</sup> Here already it is implied that the breaking of her oath would bring her to join the ranks of the nether world.

<sup>12</sup> Her words *huic uni forsan potui succumbere culpa* (4.19) may have more than one meaning (see Clausen, 1987:41-42). In my opinion the positioning of words leans towards the above-mentioned interpretation, but the phrase could also be understood as "for this one weakness".

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the thematization of space, see Hardie (1986:267ff.).



After Anna, who in a certain sense is Dido's *alter ego*, delivers her exhortation, which on the one hand makes an appeal to Dido's mind and on the other hand appeals powerfully to her feelings and induces an awareness of the greatness which could result for her people from such a marriage, Dido lets herself be persuaded. It is the narrator who comments: *His dictis incensum animum flammavit amore / spemque dedi dubiae menti solvitque pudorem*. (4.54-55) Implicit in *solvit*, as in fact earlier in *iura*, the metaphor is that of the un-binding of bonds. Man exceeds the bounds within which he ought to live. And to this no offering can make a difference. The narrator's comment is unambiguous: the priests have no understanding for what she is in fact asking (4.65).

It is this very question of understanding and knowledge which is brought to the fore in the extended Homeric simile in 4.68-73: Dido, the wounded doe, typified as *incauta*, is hit by the deadly arrow of a hunter who himself is *nescius*. Thus not only the quarry, but even the hunter lacks knowledge (see Anderson 1969:43).<sup>14</sup>

When Juno notes that her protégée Dido is caught up to such a degree in passion that her illustrious reputation, the *fama* of which she was once so proud, no longer stands in the way of her insane love, she intervenes. In the course of the story one observes in Dido a pattern of estrangement from society. The very fact that she is *regina* brands her as someone who is not solely an individual.<sup>15</sup> Like Aeneas she is (at this stage) in a certain sense a social rather than an individual heroine. Gradually the signs appear that she is neglecting her social responsibility towards her people. This is graphically depicted in the way in which the construction of the city she founded comes to an abrupt end (4.86-89) when Dido's fascination with Aeneas increases. Though some arguments have been advanced in favour of the point of view that the fall of Dido is not very closely connected with a possible neglect of her duty towards her people,<sup>16</sup> there are also arguments to the contrary. Here one notably thinks of the pattern whereby increasingly Dido becomes lonely, a motif which has a Hellenistic background (Monti 1981:50-53). Where initially she is presented as the one around whom her people revolves, later she becomes dependent on Anna as confidante. Still later we note how in her dreams she is completely cut off from her people (see 4.465ff.). Eventually she even deceives Anna and goes so far as to send away her own *nurix* (4.630ff.), to die completely alone in the end.

Another important facet is the relationship which develops between herself and Aeneas, the so-called marriage which is established under cosmic cognition. The narrator indicates this as the *arche kakôn*,<sup>17</sup> and does not agree with Dido's mitigation of her actions. At the same time his verdict is severe and visionary:

<sup>14</sup> Briggs (1980:43) draws attention to the "double sympathy" expressed by this simile, towards both Dido and Aeneas. They are figures who according to Briggs are victimized by powers outside their control.

<sup>15</sup> In my opinion it is an oversimplification to view Dido's affliction only in personal terms. Boyle's (1986:117) observation that Dido symbolizes "the private world, the world of the individual, and its values", is only partially correct. It applies to the later socially estranged Dido, rather than to Dido the *regina*. At the end of Book 4 she is once again the queen of her people.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Rudd (1976:39). Contra Rudd see Cairns (1989:51 n 77).

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of this fundamental concept in the Homeric epic and Greek tragedy see Moles (1984:51). Sanderlin (1969:84) feels that the point of view here is that of Dido.

ille dies primus leti primusque malorum  
causa fuit; neque enim specie famave movetur  
*nec iam furtivum Dido meditatur amorem:*  
*coniugium vocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam.*

(4.169-172)

While some authors argue that Dido convinced herself that she had indeed entered into a marriage (see Williams 1968:379ff. and Rudd 1976:41), in my opinion her subsequent reaction confirms what the reader intuitively senses here already, namely that in her heart of hearts Dido knows that she is acting against her own conscience. It is no marriage, but rather a pseudo-marriage, which destroys her honour (Anderson 1969:44; see also Moles 1984:53, and Quinn 1964:187). It is interesting that the old commentators like Donatus and Servius Auctus held the same view (see Feeney 1983:204-205). In my opinion the narrator's characterization of the relationship as a *furtivus amor* removes all doubt from the matter. It is a formulation which links up with the love elegy, and which, barring one exception, occurs nowhere else in an epic (see Clausen 1987:135 n.44).

Justification for this interpretation is evident from Dido's reproach to Aeneas in her first conversation after starting to suspect that he is going to leave her. Besides turning to tears, appealing to his fidelity, to the marriage that has arisen and to her merit before him, she reproaches him for being the cause of the destruction of her *pudor* and for the ruin of her former *fama* (4.320-323a). Here one notes the close connection between *pudor* and *fama*. It also emerges that Dido (despite the sacrifices offered by her) understands that she has laid down her *pudor* and that her actions were impermissible.

The realization of her guilt, that she deserves what has befallen her, is most clearly evident in 4.547-552:

"quin morere *ut merita es*, ferroque averte dolorem.  
tu lacrimis evicta meis, tu prima furem  
his, germana, malis oneras atque obicis hosti.  
*non licuit thalami expertem sine crimine vitam*  
*degere more ferae, tales nec tangere curas;*  
*non servata fides cineri promissa Sychaeo."*

Here Dido asks herself why, instead of looking for ways out of her dilemma, she does not just die as she deserved (*ut merita es*). In Dido's own eyes she deserved her death. According to her own harsh judgement, her conduct was reprehensible. The pretext that she was engaged in a marriage relationship is here abandoned. The queen herself intimates that her conduct resembled that of a wild beast. In light of this I cannot agree with the point of view that Dido here shows little insight, and that she gives herself "a pathetically shallow explanation ... of what went wrong" (Quinn 1964:187). Dido's realization that she has broken her vow is not to be relegated to a half-true evasion of guilt, even if she brings up Anna's complicity in her downfall. What we are dealing with here is *arete* put to shame (Otis 1969:57). In this scene Dido as tragic heroine obtains insight.

When in the morning after the second warning of Mercury to Aeneas, Dido notices that the shore is in a commotion because of the departure of the Trojans, her wrath erupts. At the same time we note (even up to the staccato syntax) an almost complete disorientation, while she considers all the things she could have done to Aeneas and his people: *Quid loquor? aut ubi sum? quae mentem insania mutat? / infelix Dido, nunc te facta impia tangunt?* (4.595-596).

It is an old and heavily debated issue whether *facta impia* refers to the actions of Dido or Aeneas (see Monti 1981:62-69 for a thorough discussion of this). In my opinion contextual considerations indicate that Dido's actions are meant. She realizes that derangement is threatening to gain the upper hand over her. She who in the first book was presented to the reader as just, and who was depicted in that scene as lawgiver (see 1.507), has in her humiliation almost come to the point where *facta impia* touch her. The counter-implication must not elude the reader: her realization of her own guilt does not cancel the fact that much of her former conduct was marked by *pietas*.<sup>18</sup>

That this is not merely a case of inconsistency (along the line of *varium et mutabile semper femina*), can be demonstrated with reference to various scenes. When for the first time Dido confronts Aeneas and begs him to abandon his plan, she bases her appeal on quite a number of matters, including her merit before him: *si quid bene de te merui* (4.317). Also after his response, when she reacts much more vehemently, it is clear that she believes that justice is on her side. She feels that neither Juno nor Jupiter views her affliction fairly (4.371-372). She laments the fact that trust is accorded no value (*nusquam tuta fides* (4.373)). Dido's entire appeal to Aeneas is based (ironically enough quite in Roman fashion) on *pietas* and *fides* (Monti 1981:68-69). After she has brought up her merit before him and has indicated that he is free to go and seek his kingdom across the waves, she expresses a bitter wish (4.382-387) from which it is evident that she does not for a moment hesitate to make an appeal to the fidelity of the divine powers. In Dido's eyes the actions of Aeneas are treacherous and worthy of punishment. Later, when at the place which will prove to be her sepulchre, she calls upon the gods and the stars to be witnesses, she directs her supplication to a *numen ... iustumque memorque* which guards over lovers who are involved with each other *non aequo foedere* (4.520-521). For a moment also she considers following the Trojan fleet and appealing to the gratitude which they ought to feel because she came to their rescue (4.438b-439). When, as it were, the Carthaginian queen already sees death face to face, her words evince a readiness to die: *dixit, et os impressa toro "moriemur inultae, / sed moriamur" ait* (4.659-660). Since the character herself is here speaking, the implication of *inultae* is that from her point of view it is clear that her death deserves to be avenged. Her admission of guilt does not negate this. It is made explicit in her moving prayer for an avenger and for eternal enmity (see 4.622-629).

And so we return again to the observation of Rudd (1976:52-53) with which we started, namely that it does not even occur to the reader to blame Dido, even when she invokes the curse on the progeny of Aeneas. Rudd attributes this reaction which he identifies to the reader's conception that Dido was ignorant, that she was not equal to the task of resisting this divinely instigated demonic love, and that her affliction is out of all proportion.

The fact that the gods play their part in bringing Dido down certainly contributes to the sympathy for Dido felt by the reader. Nevertheless a few annotations are in order. To start with the last observation, it should be noted that in tragedy there is not necessarily an equal relationship between the transgression of the tragic figure and the fate which befalls him. Moles (1984:49), citing Aristotle, shows that more often than not a certain imbalance between the suffering of the tragic figure and the actions which gave rise to it, is found. This has the very effect of deepening the reader's sympathy with the figure.

Secondly one must not lose sight of the fact that in the *Aeneid* Book 4 there are numerous attestations to Dido's *culpa*. Even if Rudd is right that these simply represent Dido's harsh judgement of herself and even if one would play it down by pointing out her state of mind,

<sup>18</sup> In light of her condemnation of her actions in 4.450-452 I would not count her marriage with Aeneas among these.

it still remains textual information of which account has to be given in an interpretation. I do not share the opinion that it is difficult to state precisely in what Dido's *culpa* lies (Rudd 1976:34). While Moles (1984:52) takes a narrower view and feels that her blame is to be found in "the *illicit* nature of her love-making with Aeneas", Cairns (1989:143) has a broader perspective. He regards Dido's *culpa* as something with two sides, namely on the one hand the aspect of infidelity, and on the other hand that of too large a predisposition towards love. Although this may strike the modern reader as odd, love in general and sexual love in particular was often in Antiquity regarded as a moral flaw, as "a spiritual disease, a form of madness akin to other passions such as greed and anger" (Cairns 1989:56, see also 54-57,70,140). Dido's inclination towards love is highlighted by the narrator (1.343-352) even before the "Ascanius" scene. Moreover the judgement mentioned above is not only that of Dido, but also that of the narrator (see 4.169-172). By breaking her oath, by letting go of her *pudor* and by presenting her affair as a marriage, she destined herself for the underworld by virtue of her very own curse.

Why does the reader still sympathize with Dido when she curses Aeneas and his descendants? A part of the answer to this lies in simple human compassion. The point of view from which the Dido story is being told (see Sanderlin 1969:85) also plays its role. But there is another relatively obvious factor which is usually not adequately taken into consideration. This is, to wit, the historical perspective within which the reader reads this story. When after the marriage scene the narrator utters these ominous words: *ille dies primus leti primusque malorum / causa fuit* (4.169-170), the reader is left in no uncertainty over its historical reference. Although in terms of the tale it lies in the future, for the reader in a certain sense it is history. He knows that Dido's prayer for an avenger has found its fulfilment in the actions of Hannibal who afflicted the offspring of Aeneas with the sword. But the avenger did not annihilate his adversaries. In short: for the reader this is an aetiological tale. It gives a perspective on history; it does not change its course.

In my opinion Anderson (1969:47) is correct in stating that the narrator does not call upon the reader to react sentimentally to Dido's downfall. That there is sympathy with Dido is undeniable. That the narrator is uncritical towards her, is simply not the case. In the depiction of Dido, at first as a wounded doe, later as *bacchante* and eventually as a completely disoriented woman, there is a clear line of progression. Her growing passion and *furor* are depicted as destructive. Her love is presented as a loss of royal restraint, which is confirmed by views on *amor* held in Antiquity (see Cairns 1989:54). Also the typological co-ordination of Dido with Cleopatra (4.644 and 8.709) testifies against an unconditionally positive depiction of Dido (see Cairns 1989:57). In short: Vergil is not carrying out a sanctification of *infelix Dido* and a demonization of *pious Aeneas*.

Though Dido does not bear the sole blame for her downfall, she is likewise not without blame. The narrator leaves no room for doubt that, however much divine and human actions may be intertwined, *culpa* was present in Dido. Her tendency towards love, her decision to lay down her *pudor*, the breaking of her vow to Sychaeus (this is a factor which is underplayed by many commentators, but which should be accorded its proper weight), the fact that as queen she surrendered herself sexually to Aeneas, the contracting of a marriage which she knew was no marriage, the refusal to conform to the *fata* as well as her holding them up to ridicule, her involvement in rites of sorcery, the deception of people close to her - all of these contradict the notion that Dido goes under in complete innocence. Nevertheless one does not for a moment deny that which makes Dido a figure of greatness (see Lyne 1987:49).

## The moral justifiability of Dido's downfall

But is Dido's downfall morally justified? Many an author has reservations about this. Besides a primary sympathy with Dido (and often a condemnation of Aeneas as well) and a conviction that she is exclusively a victim of the gods, support for this view is sought in the closing scene of Book 4. There we read how Juno sends Iris to deliver Dido from her suffering. The perspective provided by the narrator is the following:

*nam quia nec fato merita nec morte peribat,  
sed misera ante diem subitoque accensa furore,  
nondum illi flavum Proserpina vertice crinem  
abstulerat Stygioque caput damnaverat Orco.*

(4.696-699)

How can this be reconciled? Is the narrator inconsistent and does he find himself in two minds? On the one hand he (and Dido too) is unambiguous about the presence of *culpa* in the queen. On the other hand he lets on that she died *nec fato merita nec morte* before the day ordained for her. Rudd (1976:36) interprets the words as a confirmation of the position that Dido did not deserve to die.

Furthermore an appeal can be made to the reunion scene in the underworld (6.440-476). Aeneas, who formerly did not understand the intensity of her sorrow in its full measure (6.463-464) and who could only look upon the signs of her death without comprehension (5.1-4), is deeply struck by her *casu iniquo* (6.475). Involuntarily the reader's thoughts return to the pious wish of Aeneas in Book 1, a prayer which remained glaringly unfulfilled:

*Si qua pios respectant numina, si quid  
usquam iustitiae est et mens sibi conscia recti,  
praemia digna ferant.*

(1.603-605)

The concepts of fidelity, justice and conscience are here conspicuously used in close conjunction. A dry grammatical observation is required: the indicative form of the first two verbs indicates that Aeneas uses his words factually. For him there is in uttering them no futile hope. The gods look after the faithful; there is such a thing as justice; conscience states its demand and its claim. And yet Dido does not obtain the rewards which Aeneas foresees for her.

Different explanations of the narrator's perspective are possible. One could say that the poet exhibited such empathy with Dido that he momentarily broke with his position as narrator. But this would be unexpected for a reader who knows Vergil as pre-eminently the poet of coherence. An argument could also be put forward that the formulation of the narrator ties in with the conventionality of the description of the suicide.<sup>19</sup>

A more ominous explanation, however, is possible, especially if one takes into account that this narrative comment is in a certain sense almost the narrator's last word on the subject. It is an interpretation mentioned by Rudd (1976:53), but from which in the end he shies away, namely that the gods take no account whatsoever of man. That the will of the gods

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<sup>19</sup> The fact that the indication here is that Dido died *subito ... accensa furore*, while the reader is aware for how long she has already been in the grip of the *furore*, and how she planned her death to the last detail, also points to a conventional depiction of the suicide.

inexorably marches on throughout history. That it rolls right over man and overwhelms him. That suffering and justice have very little to do with each other.

But first one must call a halt, because the interpretation given to the narrator's provision of perspective in lines 696-697 takes the matter too far. It is unlikely that *nec fato* refers to a death which lies outside the *fata*. The fact that death sets in *nec fato*, indicates nothing other than that Dido did not die a natural death, but rather a violent one (see Pappillon & Haigh 1892:201; Trollope 1865:228; Page 1960:394).<sup>20</sup> In the light of her admission of blame it does not appear that *nec merita morte* is to be understood in the absolute sense, but rather that it must be interpreted restrictively.

Therefore I do not think that an interpretation of Dido's death as morally unjustifiable can rely solely on lines 696-697. Moreover, *casu iniquo* is a perspective given by the narrator on how Aeneas feels about Dido's fate. The problem of the moral justifiability of Dido's death does not, however, disappear. The question before which the reader finds himself is, in terms of the Steiner quotation above, whether she dies because of "a specific moral fault and failure of understanding" or whether she is brought to ruin by powers residing outside the "governance of reason and justice".

Here one thinks of the narrator's question in the *prooemium* to the *Aeneid*: *tantae ne animis caelestibus irae?* (1.11) What is alarming is that the question is in fact rhetorical. There is no doubt that the gods harbour such wrath (see Jenkyns 1988:65). The *ira deum* was for the Roman an intense reality (Thornton 1976:156). Jenkyns (1988:68) draws attention to Vergil's sense of history and contends that the poet perceives not only change, but also progress.<sup>21</sup> In terms of the vision of reality in the epic<sup>22</sup> I would rather place the accent on how the *fata* find their way in history, not without opposition, yet in the long run inevitably (see 10.113).

This notion of historical inevitability is not necessarily amoral. On the contrary. Right and wrong are fundamental categories in this epic (Thornton 1976:155). To follow and to bring to realization the *fata* is good; to resist them leads to ruin (Thornton 1984:10). Pöschl (1970:18) too accentuates the moral dimension of the struggle against *furor impius*. The fact that the narrator uses moral terminology regarding Dido's blame and downfall, makes it impossible to postulate that the destruction and catastrophes are simply random. They do have a moral, even cosmological, dimension. The moral dimension of the story is most intimately linked with the idea of Rome. Dido (and for that matter Aeneas as well) had to learn and accept that there is no escaping the *fata*. In the *Aeneid*, which is the epic of Rome, right and wrong are viewed in Roman, and therefore also in historical, terms. The course of history is embedded in a cosmic order.<sup>23</sup> But to be able to see this, one has to

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<sup>20</sup> The translation of Day Lewis (1966:245) reads: "Since she was dying neither a natural death nor from others' / Violence, but desperate and untimely, driven to it / By a crazed impulse, not yet had Proserpine clipped from her head / The golden tress, or consigned her soul to the Underworld."

<sup>21</sup> Needless to say, this provides no consolation - other than may be the case in the story of Turnus - as far as the fate of Dido and her people is concerned.

<sup>22</sup> For the purpose of this discussion I pass by the question whether this represents the vision of Vergil or whether it is part of a literary strategy.

<sup>23</sup> See Hardie (1986:69) with his characterization of the political ideology of this epic. He points out the close relationship, even the interchangeability of *imperium* and *cosmos*. See further Klingner 1961b:308.

view history through Roman eyes. However, the fact that the theme of founding is apparently localized, becomes in terms of the ideology of the *Aeneid* (which the reader can accept or reject) universal "... by virtue of the fact that all things and peoples must be seen eventually in relationship to the one city and people of Rome" (Hardie 1986:25).

And the epic relates the fact that historical greatness is not realized without suffering: *tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem* (1.31).<sup>24</sup> In this process people are afflicted, and figures of grandeur come to ruin. And then it is not only Dido's fall that makes her a grand figure. It is also the way in which she goes under, which bestows a tragic dimension upon it. Here I am thinking of the acceptance of her blame, the regaining of her dignity, the realization that her own death was unavoidable if she wanted to retain her self-respect.<sup>25</sup> Her death is also not solely the death of an individual: through dying she seals the future fate of Carthage. Thus her demise gains a historical dimension. Her experience is indeed more than a psychological process (Pöschl 1970:74). In the *Aeneid* the individual is taken up in broader contexts. Vergil's notion of the tragic is most closely connected with the historical and cosmological vision of the *Aeneid*.

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<sup>24</sup> See Pöschl (1970:39): "It was the Roman poet, Vergil, who discovered the grievous burden of history and its vital meaning. He was the first to perceive deeply the cost of historical greatness ..."

<sup>25</sup> This is not meant to imply that Dido was incapable of choosing differently, but indeed that in her pride she could act no differently in order to regain her dignity (but see Anderson 1969:48). In my opinion Rudd (1976:49) correctly states that Dido could have chosen differently.

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